

# Mohammedan Kurds in Western Persia

by the

INTER-SYNODICAL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN  
ORIENT-MISSION SOCIETY

The lands of the nearer Orient, especially Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Arabia, Persia, are rapidly forcing themselves into the very center of missionary interest.

## The Opening Wedge

For a long time the churches found it impossible to carry the gospel to the Mohammedan population in these regions, because according to the law of Islam the Moslems that turned Christian, as well as the missionary that converted him, were both guilty of a capital crime. But there was one thing which they could do and which they did: they brought help to the oppressed Greek Christians, whose condition, as a result of agelong tyranny and oft-repeated massacres, was most pitiable. Thus were established in these Mohammedan countries churches, schools, hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages, etc., and Protestant Christianity gained a foothold there.

## Changed Attitude of Moslems

The result has been not only to aid the Oriental Christians, but also to reduce greatly the prevalent Mohammedan fanaticism. Gradually Mohammedans have learned to make use of the Christian hospitals for their sick and of the Christian schools for their children. In addition, "relief work administered by the American missions in real sympathy amid the appalling suffering following the Balkan war has won the hearts of the Turks. They know the supreme need for their people of mental and moral education and they are looking to Americans for their models and their guides. They are reading our Bible and other Christian books, and are ready to listen to the gospel message as never before. Behold the doors thrown wide open by these newly awakened people to their friends of the West, especially to the American Christians."

(Herrick)

John R. Mott says that during his first visit to Constantinople, in 1895, he found it impossible to gain access to the university students there; but that three years ago he went again to attend a conference of The World's Student Christian Federation, held in the political capital of the Mohammedan world and attended, in constantly increasing numbers, by Mohammedans. This in itself would be sufficiently remarkable. But it was not all. He was requested to speak to the students of the great Stamboul University, addressed a packed house in the largest hall obtainable, was listened to respectfully and even sympathetically, and found it almost impossible to get away after the address, because besieged by crowds of men asking "the most searching questions with the eager desire that characterizes a drowning man when he

grasps the plank thrown to him for his rescue." Says Dr. Mott, "In nearly all parts of Turkey you are today free to travel, to hold conventions and great assemblies, to circulate papers and pamphlets by the thousands, and to do searching evangelistic work. The field is open, it is accessible, and it is responsive."

Pastor Lohman reports concerning his recent trip in the Orient: "Often Mohammedans begged me to be admitted to our prayer and Bible meetings. One day, as I was about to cross the Euphrates River, a number of Mohammedans asked me to postpone my trip and to tell them of Jesus, which, of course, I most willingly did. What longings have I perceived for salvation! I must confess that nowhere in all Europe I have seen such a hunger for the bread of life."

#### **Beginnings of Lutheran Work**

The Lutheran Church, also, made attempts to carry light to the Orient, Hermannsburg, I believe, leading the way. Believing that the degraded Oriental church could be revived by the word of God alone, Hermannsburg and several American Lutheran bodies educated young Nestorians at their seminaries. These afterwards returned and assumed charge of congregations in their home church. Having been carried on on a very limited scale, these efforts were not productive of great direct results. Indirectly, however, they have led to the formation of our Inter-Synodical Evangelical Lutheran Orient-Mission Society, inasmuch as Pastor L. O. Fossum, having been sent to Persia to look after work carried on by Syrian workers, became so intensely interested in the field, and so enthusiastically hopeful of its possibilities, that when he returned home he organized a society to evangelize Kurdistan. In the fall of 1911 Pastor Fossum, together with a medical missionary, Dr. E. Edman, arrived in Soujbulak, in Persian Kurdistan, and established there a Lutheran mission station, the first Mohammedan mission, I think, ever established by the Lutheran Church.

This work is, of course, of a nature entirely different from that carried on before. While the early Lutheran work was done by natives and confined to the Oriental Christian Church, this present work is in the hands of missionaries and has for its main object the evangelization of Mohammedans.

#### **Work begun in Kurdistan**

When the missionaries arrived in Soujbulak, Dr. Edman opened a dispensary, while Pastor Fossum attempted to gather the Christians he found there into a small congregation and to commence educational work.

It goes without saying that the breaking of virgin soil in the mission field, such as we are compelled to do in Kurdistan, is connected with innumerable difficulties. In our case, these were enhanced by the fact that the Kurdish language is not a literary language. It possesses no literature, no books. Learning a foreign tongue so as to be able not only to speak it colloquially, but to preach and write books in it, is a formidable enough undertaking when all modern educational facilities, such as trained teachers, grammars, dictionaries,

etc., are provided. But it becomes infinitely more difficult when all these helps are either lacking or else of a most elementary, incomplete and rudimentary nature.

### **Difficult Beginning**

When our brethren arrived in Kurdistan, they found themselves face to face with the necessity of first learning a language that had practically no books to learn it from, and then writing books to make it possible to teach the Kurds in schools. Pastor Fossum indeed attempted to establish both Sunday and day schools soon after his arrival; but he found it well nigh impossible to do either while there was an almost complete absence of necessary books and other material.

### **Splendid Progress**

Things look very much different to-day. Pastor Fossum possesses a natural gift for languages and seems to have gained a sufficient knowledge of Kurdish in a surprisingly short time. He has now written the following books: 1) a Translation of the Four Gospels; 2) Luther's Smaller Catechism; 3) a Kurdish Primer; 4) a Hymnbook, translated from German, Swedish, English, and Norwegian Lutheran hymns; 5) an Arithmetic; 6) an Elementary Geography; 7) a Reader. Of these the Primer has been printed, the Four Gospels were to go to press last summer, but the breaking out of the war may have prevented this.

Also, Pastor Fossum started the publication of a small monthly paper in Kurdish.

All of this shows how hard Pastor Fossum has worked. As a result, we are today in a position to do elementary school work, provided the necessary teachers can be had.

### **Medical Work**

The medical branch of the work has had to confine itself to dispensary and home treatment, because, so far, it has been impossible to establish a hospital. Dr. Edman reported, however, that many of the better class of people have begun to patronize the mission dispensary and that it was gaining a wider and wider circle of friends. A branch dispensary was established at Nakada, about 28 miles from Soujbulak. Dr. Edman has resigned but we must be ever thankful to him for the pioneer work he has done for us in so difficult a field as Kurdistan and under such primitive conditions as prevailing during the first months of his stay there.

### **Orphanage**

Besides these missionaries, two ladies went out to work among the Kurds, Miss Augusta Gudhart, a registered nurse, and Miss Meta von der Schulenburg, a teacher. In the care of the latter there are now three orphan children, one boy and two little foundling girls. Orphan work affords a wonderful opportunity for spreading Christianity. If we can but get hold of Kurdish children at a tender age and bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, these will, in time, prove a powerful leaven to penetrate Kurdish national life.

We are affiliated in this work with Hermannsburg, the original plan being that they should also send out at least one European missionary. For a long time it was impossible

to find such a one. God has given them, in the person of Professor George Bachimont, a worker especially equipped for educational work; but the war is temporarily preventing his taking hold of the work.

Fortunately the Kurds are very anxious to have schools established in their midst. In these schools we would be permitted to instruct children in the Bible; for the Kurds are so anxious for education that they will accept Christian instruction in the bargain.

### Encouraging Outlook

The outlook is most encouraging. Pastor Fossum implores us for more men. "The field," he writes, "is open everywhere. I can occupy any point I like in the entire field. large as it is, if I only had someone to take my place here. Please don't think or plan for anything else than at least two men as soon as possible. If we had ten men we could place them at once in the best places possible for Moslem missionary work. And we have ALL THE NECESSARY LITERATURE now."

### Need of Teachers

One of our greatest needs is TEACHERS. And here we must make energetic efforts immediately. We need men who can begin a teachers' seminary in Kurdistan for the training of native youths. Such a seminary should be established as early and on as extensive a scale as possible, that the clamoring of the Kurds for education may be satisfied.

Hence, our first and most important duty is to ask the Lord of the harvest to give us laborers, men who will undertake to devote their lives to the education of Christian teachers for the youth of Kurdistan. Oh may the Lord grant us the right men for this important task! And may He grant us a sufficient number of them! And may He grant them to us soon, that we may begin direct work upon this vast field of millions of perishing Kurdish souls!

Think! Here is an entire nation lost in unbelief, perishing in the darkness of Islam; its youth condemned to grow up in superstition and ignorance. And the doors are thrown wide open to us; longing hands are stretched out to welcome us; eager voices are begging, Come over and help us; influential chiefs are offering their support! Besides, there are now available the most necessary text-books, both for religious and for secular instruction. And in the face of all this, we are forced to remain inactive, because we have not men to take hold and push this great cause! Surely, we have no time to lose. Satan is busy all the time, and he is busy now, trying to take away from us the exceptional opportunity that through the providence of God is being offered to us. And if we allow this opportunity to be lost, we will never get another one like it.

God, give us zeal and wisdom and faith to launch forth boldly into the deep and perform the task assigned to us.

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